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Second report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1620 (2005), by which the Council established the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), and requested me to keep it regularly informed of the implementation of the UNIOSIL mandate as set out in that resolution. The report covers major developments in Sierra Leone and the activities of UNIOSIL since my report of 28 April 2006 (S/2006/269).

II. Major developments

2. I visited Sierra Leone on 1 and 2 July, to witness the activities of UNIOSIL and the United Nations Country Team, and to consult with the Government on how best the United Nations system could continue to support its peace consolidation efforts. I met with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, Vice President Solomon Berewa and other senior government officials, as well as personnel of UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team. In their assessment of the situation in the country, both the Government and the United Nations system expressed satisfaction with the status of progress in the peace consolidation process, particularly with regard to the finalization of the peace consolidation strategy referred to in my April report. They also confirmed gains made in the reform of the security sector, and reported on the Government's efforts to expedite governance reforms to consolidate the fragile democracy, as well as on the support being provided by the United Nations and other partners to improve the socio-economic situation in the country.

3. At the same time, the Government and UNIOSIL brought to my attention the many challenges still facing Sierra Leone. They stressed that youth unemployment remains the most immediate potential threat to the stability of the country, and that the slow pace of economic recovery hinders efforts to create employment opportunities. They also stressed the need to intensify anti-corruption efforts and to accelerate the reform of the judiciary. In addition, they underlined the importance of the national elections scheduled to take place in 2007, and the challenges that the elections pose for the limited capacity of the national security sector and the National Electoral Commission. In that regard, we agreed that there is a need for

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substantial technical, logistical and financial support from the international community to help to ensure the success and credibility of the elections.

4. During the initial meeting of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone held in New York on 19 July 2006, the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone elaborated on the above challenges, stressing that the problem of youth unemployment was compounded by large numbers of ex-combatants and school dropouts who could be a source of threat to security. He also acknowledged that there is a persistent public perception of corruption within the government and state institutions. In addition, he identified Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure, including poor and inadequate road and electricity networks, as major constraints in the efforts to stimulate economic recovery, emphasizing that the slow release of pledged donor funds hampers the implementation of the Government's poverty reduction strategy. The Minister expressed his Government's readiness to work closely with the Peacebuilding Commission to address these challenges and to reinforce the gains made thus far in the peace consolidation process.

5. On 19 and 20 July, Sierra Leone's civil society groups held consultations in Freetown on peacebuilding challenges. The meeting identified the following possible areas of support by the Peacebuilding Commission: promoting human rights, democracy and freedom of the press, expanding access to justice, supporting security sector reform, mainstreaming gender, strengthening the capacity of public institutions, and implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

6. On 21 June, President Kabbah's Office issued a statement expressing the Government's determination to address emerging negative trends in the country, some of which were mentioned in my April report. They include the corruption within the Sierra Leone police (SLP) and the lack of respect for rules and regulations shown by personnel in some government ministries, in particular the Ministry of Lands. The statement also expressed deep concern about increasing lawlessness and indiscipline across the spectrum of the political and civil society of Sierra Leone. It called on political parties and their respective members to respect the Constitution and the law, and strongly urged government officials to conduct themselves in a professional manner while carrying out their public duties.

7. In his address at the opening of the session of the Parliament on 23 June, President Kabbah reported on the progress Sierra Leone had made so far, including the Government's ability to sustain a stable security environment following the departure of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and the strengthening of the democratic dispensation ushered into Sierra Leone with the successful conduct of the 2002 elections. In that regard, he stressed that the citizens of Sierra Leone were becoming increasingly familiar with democratic multi-party competition.

8. Another illustration of the strengthening of democracy highlighted by the President in his 23 June statement is the increase in the number of political parties in Sierra Leone to 28, the expansion of political discourse throughout the country, and the proliferation of local media outlets. Sierra Leone now has 49 daily newspapers and 39 radio stations, 32 of which are privately owned.

9. On 17 August, the President informed UNIOSIL of his Government's intention to initiate amendments to the Constitution, which will be included on the ballot for a

referendum during the 2007 elections. To that end, the Law Reform Commission of Sierra Leone has already started reviewing the 1991 Constitution, with a view to ensuring that it reflects the new political, social and economic reality in the country. In a statement issued on 24 August, the Government stressed that, notwithstanding the constitutional review, the existing Constitution will remain in force during and after the 2007 elections.

10. In the meantime, a controversial election conducted by the Government on 12 August to fill the vacancy in the paramount chieftaincy of the Biriwa-Limba Chiefdom in the Northern Province underscored the fragility of the political stability in Sierra Leone. The electoral process has divided the population of the chiefdom along ethnic lines. The Biriwa paramount chieftaincy fell vacant in 2002, following which six unsuccessful attempts were made to elect a new paramount chief. Ensuing disputes between the majority Limba ethnic group, which had traditionally held the chieftaincy, and the minority Mandingo ethnic group resulted in a prolonged period of heightened tension and violent protests that created security concerns in the area.

11. In August, the National Electoral Commission rejected the Government's request to conduct the election, citing insecurity in the chiefdom and procedural issues. Nonetheless, on 11 August, the Government issued a public notice confirming that the election would proceed and contending that the National Electoral Commission did not have the mandate to conduct the chiefdom election. The Ministry of Local Government proceeded to conduct the election, which was boycotted by the six Limba candidates. The seat was won by the sole running candidate, who belongs to the Mandingo ethnic group. The Limba's ethnic group is challenging the election and tensions continue to simmer in the area.

12. There are also worrisome signs of growing intolerance among various political party leaders and their supporters, which portend acrimonious and potentially violent campaigns in the period leading up to the 2007 elections. Some political parties and their supporters are reported to have declared certain areas "off-limits" to the opponents. Also, on 21 June, the Government issued a directive that political parties must obtain the permission of the police in order to hold political meetings. The directive has created concern among the political parties, who contend that it has the potential for abuse and could limit legitimate political activities.

13. The gender adviser in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations conducted a technical assessment mission in Sierra Leone in May and June, and developed recommendations aimed at increasing the participation of women in the political process. The recommendations include a proposal to allocate a quota for women in decision-making public positions, as well as intensified voter and civic education campaigns. UNIOSIL has submitted the recommendations to the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission for consideration. Also, as an immediate first step, UNIOSIL has appointed a gender focal point to facilitate efforts aimed at integrating gender-sensitive approaches in the planning of support for the elections in 2007, pending the appointment of a full-time gender adviser.

14. Meanwhile, UNIOSIL continued to coordinate the support of the United Nations system for the Government's peace consolidation efforts. From 30 June to 1 July, an international workshop was held in Freetown to discuss ways of effectively implementing the peace consolidation strategy that was jointly prepared by the Government, UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team. Participants

agreed that projects undertaken under the strategy should focus, in particular on challenges related to youth unemployment, institutional capacity-building and the strengthening of the security sector.

15. From 12 to 19 May, a delegation from Burundi comprising senior Burundian government officials, as well as representatives of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) and the United Nations country team in Burundi visited Sierra Leone to study the operations of UNIOSIL and the integration of the United Nations system in Sierra Leone, with a view to applying a similar model to the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Burundi. During consultations with the Government of Sierra Leone, the delegation was informed of the close coordination between the Government and the United Nations agencies during the planning for the withdrawal of UNAMSIL and the preparation for the establishment of UNIOSIL, as well as the need for the national Government to take the lead in setting the priorities for the peace consolidation process. As Council members are already aware, the Government of Burundi has decided to request the establishment of a United Nations integrated office in Burundi similar to UNIOSIL.

III. Security situation

16. The security situation in Sierra Leone has remained stable, but still fragile. The transfer of the former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, from the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown to The Hague on 20 June, pursuant to resolution 1688 (2006), removed a major potential source of instability in the country. The security agencies of Sierra Leone played a key role and coordinated closely with UNIOSIL and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in the security arrangements at the Special Court for Sierra Leone during Mr. Taylor's detention in Freetown, as well as during his transfer to The Hague.

17. Currently, the most serious potential threats to the country's stability emanate from domestic challenges, including the need to improve the general standard of living of the population, stimulate economic progress, step up anti-corruption efforts, and address the issue of high unemployment, particularly of the youth.

18. The continuing border dispute between Sierra Leone and Guinea remains a source of serious concern, although the two Governments have resolved to seek a solution through negotiations. To that end, the technical committees of Guinea and Sierra Leone met in Conakry on 16 and 17 May, and agreed to refer all outstanding matters to the respective Governments for their consideration. As a follow-up to the Conakry meeting, the Minister of Territorial Affairs of Guinea held consultations with the Government of Sierra Leone on 25 August. I appeal to President Lansana Conte and President Kabbah to expedite the peaceful and mutually acceptable resolution of the matter.

IV. Security sector reform

A. The Sierra Leone police

19. The current strength of the Sierra Leone police stands at some 8,980 personnel, still short of the target strength of 9,500 set by the Government. A six-

month training course for a new group of police recruits is under way. During the reporting period, the Sierra Leone police developed a comprehensive strategic plan for 2006-2008, which is aimed at enhancing the level of professionalism within the force, with a particular emphasis on its middle management.

20. In collaboration with the United Kingdom-funded Justice Sector Development Programme, UNIOSIL has developed a training programme to assist the Sierra Leone police in implementing its strategic plan and also to enhance the capacity of the police force to provide security during the 2007 elections. In that regard, the UNIOSIL police section is concentrating on supporting the efforts to build the capacity of the Sierra Leone police to maintain public law and order. However, the lack of adequate equipment for the police remains a serious constraint. UNIOSIL has also assisted the Government to establish a multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism, under the chairmanship of the Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police, to increase coordination with all concerned international partners.

21. Additionally, UNIOSIL continued to provide support to the Sierra Leone police in such key areas as human resource management, recruit training, the development of a crime statistics database, criminal investigation procedures, airport security, border control, and traffic management. Given the wide range of areas in which the national police require support and capacity-building, the small team of 20 UNIOSIL police advisers is overstretched. A large proportion of the police advisers are deployed in the Western/Freetown area owing to the prevalence of potential security threats. The remaining United Nations police personnel are deployed in other geographic locations in the country where their tasks include mentoring the national police on the investigation of crimes against women and children, establishment of an independent police complaints authority, and liaison with the judicial sector.

B. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

22. The strength of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces currently stands at approximately 10,300 military personnel. The Ministry of Defence, with the support of the United Kingdom-led International Military Advisory and Training Team, is conducting a review of the overall structures of the armed forces to achieve cost effectiveness and sustainability, without compromising the capacity to carry out its constitutionally mandated tasks and responsibilities.

23. The international community has contributed significantly to strengthening the capacity of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. The patrol boats donated by the United States and China have enhanced the capability of the maritime wing of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. During the period under review, the maritime wing successfully intercepted some 22 illegal fishing boats in the territorial waters of Sierra Leone. Two of those vessels were engaged in smuggling and one vessel was engaged in piracy. The patrol boats are also currently deployed to rescue Sierra Leonean fishing boats that are in distress.

24. The UNIOSIL military liaison team continues to work closely with the International Military Advisory and Training Team and the United Kingdom Department for International Development in providing support for the ongoing security sector reforms. The assistance provided by the UNIOSIL military liaison team focuses primarily on planning guidance at all levels within the security sector

and information gathering to help the Government's decision-making process. UNIOSIL also facilitates liaison between the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and UNMIL for the conduct of concurrent patrols of the eastern border with Liberia to prevent the illegal cross-border movement of persons and arms.

25. The conditions of service for armed forces personnel, including payment of salaries, rations and medical care, continued to improve during the reporting period. A remaining concern is the lack of adequate housing for soldiers, particularly in outlying areas of the country. That continues to have a serious negative impact on their morale. DFID is considering the extension of its Operation "Pebu" to construct more accommodation units for the armed forces. Also, the Government of India continued the construction of 400 prefabricated housing barracks for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. However, additional financial support is required from the international community to meet this critical need.

C. Office of National Security

26. The Office of National Security continues to enhance its role of coordinating Sierra Leonean security agencies and other government departments on security-related matters. The Office has been working on measures to improve the monitoring and reporting capacity of provincial and district security committees. During the reporting period, the Office played a key coordinating role in the preparation of national contingency plans to deter hostile acts against the Special Court for Sierra Leone while Mr. Taylor was detained at the Court, respond to a possible outbreak of avian influenza, and address a serious water shortage in Freetown.

27. The Office of National Security is also working to establish liaison with its counterpart in Liberia, the National Security Agency, in order to share information as well as experience on security sector reform. The UNIOSIL military liaison team and other international stakeholders continue to support the initiatives of the Office of National Security through a series of training programmes and the provision of logistical support, in addition to advice focused on enhancing its capacity for research and intelligence analysis.

Preparations for the 2007 elections

28. On 3 August, President Kabbah announced that presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in Sierra Leone on 28 July 2007. Meanwhile, the National Elections Commission has completed the delimitation of the 112 constituency boundaries in the country's 14 administrative districts. The proposed constituency boundaries will be submitted to Parliament for approval. The Commission has also developed a concept of operations and budget for the elections, with support from UNIOSIL and UNDP. Currently, the Commission is focusing on elaborating a detailed workplan with timelines based on the concept of operations. The preparations for voter registration remain one of the most urgent tasks to be implemented by the Commission.

29. In July, a United Nations-sponsored electoral legal consultant conducted a comprehensive review of the electoral legal framework of Sierra Leone, which resulted in several recommendations for revisions that need to be made in advance of the elections. The recommended electoral law reforms would bring the conduct of

the elections into conformity with international electoral and human rights standards. In particular, they are aimed at minimizing the potential for abuse, establishing a credible electoral dispute process, and guaranteeing the freedoms of association, speech and assembly. It is paramount that government authorities review the recommendations and introduce the proposed revisions to the law to Parliament for its approval as soon as possible.

30. With the announcement of the date of the elections, international electoral assistance will now focus on providing direct support for the conduct of the elections. In that regard, the National Elections Commission has accepted an international technical assistance package that will put in place a small but experienced team of international electoral experts, coordinated by the United Nations, to support the operational capacity of the Commission.

31. The Government of Sierra Leone is current on its financial disbursements to the National Electoral Commission. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Kingdom, Ireland and the European Commission have also agreed to increase the level of their financial support to the Commission, while the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has indicated its intention to provide additional support to the electoral process. Nonetheless, there is still a gap of $8 to $9 million in the electoral budget. I would like to appeal to Member States to provide the resources needed to close the gap to allow for the successful conduct of the electoral process.

32. In addition to registering political parties, the activities of the Political Parties Registration Commission are also focused on monitoring the conduct of political parties and mediating, if requested by the involved parties, disputes that might arise between political parties or leaders. The activities of the Commission are, however, seriously impeded by lack of funding. The Government acknowledges that that is a problem that needs to be addressed and continues to appeal to donors for assistance. The Political Parties Registration Commission is working in close coordination with UNIOSIL to finalize a political parties' code of conduct, which is still under consideration by the political stakeholders. UNIOSIL has also supported the Commission in setting up a mechanism for engaging with all political parties through regular consultative meetings and press briefings, to increase inter-party dialogue and cooperation. UNIOSIL and UNDP are also jointly working with the Commission to host conflict-prevention workshops for Sierra Leonean political parties.

V. Governance

A. Decentralization

33. Since the re-establishment of local government structures following the 2004 elections, some progress has been made to enhance devolution and transfer fiscal responsibility from the central Government to local councils, particularly in the areas of health, education, agriculture and waste management. Meanwhile, participation in local government processes is gradually improving, although the local councils still suffer from the lack of adequate funding. In addition, some line ministries are still reluctant to devolve their authority to the local councils. At the same time, the overlapping roles and functions of traditional leaders in the new local

government structure have not been rationalized. The revised United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2006-2007 emphasizes the enhancement of transparent, accountable and democratic governance at the national and local levels as one of the priority assistance objectives of the United Nations system in Sierra Leone.

B. Parliament

34. In the current Parliament, the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) holds a majority with 83 members, while the opposition has 29 members, 27 of which are from the All People's Congress (APC) party. Parliamentarians continue to face constraints in carrying out their responsibilities. In particular, visits to their constituencies and the performance of Parliament's oversight of various government entities continue to be hampered by inadequate human resources and technical capacity.

35. UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team, as well as some non-governmental organizations, have organized a number of workshops aimed at strengthening the capacity of Parliament to conduct informed debates. Following a recent needs assessment of parliamentary personnel, UNIOSIL is providing training to the Parliament's staff. UNIOSIL also continues to monitor legislative proceedings, with a view to advising on how Parliament could strengthen its capacity to carry out its oversight functions, especially in the area of public accounts. The United Nations is also working to strengthen the Parliament's role in promoting and protecting human rights, dealing with issues affecting vulnerable groups, addressing HIV/AIDS, and implementing important international treaty obligations, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, among other issues.

C. Public sector reform

36. The implementation of the Government's road map for the reform of the civil service, which was adopted in 2005, is progressing at a slow pace, particularly with regard to the key aspects relating to salary reforms and the streamlining of line ministries. Efforts are ongoing to improve the transparency of the public sector, especially with regard to public procurement, public service delivery and auditing. Considering that more than 60 per cent of Sierra Leone's public expenditure is consumed by the procurement of goods and services, international assistance is increasingly focusing on helping the Government to institutionalize and improve procurement standards and regulations in Ministries and Departments. In that regard, the Government, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and UNDP are sponsoring the conduct of an annual survey of public expenditure tracking, which is aimed at enhancing accountability and oversight of public expenditure. The implementation of such a tracking system needs to become routine as a tool for expenditure performance monitoring.

D. Anti-Corruption Programme

37. The effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission remains seriously hampered by its limited capacity to detect, investigate and document corrupt

practices. To address that problem, the Commission is developing a strategic plan of action, which will include a set of benchmarks focused on improving its investigation, detection and prosecution capacities. It is also working to sensitize the general public to the social and economic consequences of corruption. In the meantime, UNIOSIL and other partners have proposed an early review of the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, which was launched in March 2005.

38. In July, the Government signed an Improved Governance and Accountability Pact with the African Development Bank, the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the European Commission and the World Bank. That strategic programme is focused on 10 critical governance reforms to be implemented before July 2007, in such areas as addressing corruption, improving procurement practices, restructuring the civil service, decentralization and fighting money-laundering.

VI. Economic recovery and socio-economic aspects

39. There has been a significant improvement in Sierra Leone's economic performance over the past few years, which continued in 2005. Real gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to have grown by 7.3 per cent in 2005, underpinned by continued recovery in agriculture, mining, construction and the services sectors. While future growth is projected to slow down, macroeconomic performance is expected to remain strong. The average real GDP growth rate is forecast to start out at 7.4 per cent in 2006, and gradually taper off to 6.1 per cent by 2008.

40. Average inflation for 2006 was projected at 12.5 per cent, owing to higher oil prices, depreciation of exchange rate and expansion in money supply, but it is expected to fall to 11.7 per cent during 2006. The country's external current-account balance is expected to narrow to 11 per cent of GDP by 2008, as exports are expected to grow following the resumption of rutile and bauxite mining, and a moderation of imports, flexible exchange rates and increased competition from trade liberalization.

41. Sierra Leone's continued dependence on external sources of capital remains, however, a source of concern. If that trend continues, the country will not be able to reach and sustain the rate of real economic growth required for socio-economic development. External capital flows must, therefore, be channelled into programmes that broaden economic participation and develop the ability of the people of Sierra Leone to produce goods and services that are competitive in both domestic and international markets.

42. The Government is working closely with its international partners to stimulate national and foreign investment in sectors that are currently experiencing dynamic growth, including mining, agriculture, fisheries and tourism. Much of the growth improvement is expected to come from the resumption of rutile and bauxite operations in 2006.

43. The Government continues to expand its control over the diamond mining areas of the country and international investment in the mining sector has increased, aided by the recent launch of a USAID-funded diamond governance project. However, residents in diamond mining areas, including Kono District, Eastern

Region, have alleged that the Government neglects to consult landowners when issuing mining concessions to foreign companies. There are also concerns that foreign companies in some instances have failed to respect their obligations to adequately compensate those displaced by their mining activities.

44. During the reporting period, the serious and reoccurring disruptions of the water supply in Freetown impacted negatively on the fragile economic situation, as well as on the welfare of the population and the sanitation conditions in Freetown. The crisis resulted from the gradual lowering of the water level at the Guma Valley Dam, due to deforestation caused by urban development in the catchment area.

45. The lack of adequate energy supplies continues to hamper the transition of the economy from primary production to manufacturing by discouraging foreign investment. While several projects supported by bilateral and multilateral agencies are under way to increase energy generation in Sierra Leone, the current supply is not sufficient to meet the growing demand. In the meantime, the Government has requested the World Bank to assist it in the coordination of energy project initiatives.

46. Poverty reduction in Sierra Leone will depend on the development of a private sector that generates employment opportunities and revenue. In that regard, the Government has approved a comprehensive private sector development strategy, focused on the need for the liberalization of trade and exchange rate regimes, tax reforms, restructuring of public enterprises and their divestiture, reform of the banking industry and review of legislation relating to business activities. The implementation of the strategy has been constrained by weak institutional capacity, inadequate coordination and lack of resources.

A. Basic services

47. Food security continued to improve during the reporting period. To help sustain that positive trend, the United Nations will continue to focus its activities in 2006 on programmes that increase food production and market access, as well as the provision of essential support services to farmers.

48. The improvement of key infrastructures, including roads, is critical to connect food producers to markets, which would contribute to the revitalization of rural communities. With United Nations agencies assistance and funding, the Government launched in May a nationwide food security, farm production, and health and nutrition survey to provide an analysis of food vulnerability, in addition to recommendations for specific required programme interventions.

49. Progress was also made during the reporting period in the area of basic education, particularly in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals focused on education. A comprehensive education status report has been finalized with the support of the World Bank. The report indicates that enrolment doubled in primary schools between 2000-2001 and 2004-2005, and that the share of expenditure allocated to education stabilized at 20 per cent, which is larger than all other sectors with the exception of general public services. An education sector-wide reform plan is expected to be completed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with technical support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in September.

50. In the meantime, UNICEF is providing policy and technical support for education sector reform. During the second quarter of 2006, the World Food Programme (WFP) expanded its school feeding programme, and now feeds some 250,000 schoolchildren in more than 900 public primary schools in the eastern and central parts of the country. Despite these achievements, some 25 to 30 per cent of primary school-aged children remain out of school.

51. The Government has identified neo-natal, child and maternal survival as a key priority area for its health services. Sierra Leone continues to have one of the world's highest under five and maternal mortality rates. With support from UNICEF and the World Health Organization, the Government is finalizing the development of a national strategic plan for child survival. The World Bank has committed some $30 million towards implementation of the plan.

B. Youth

52. The issue of youth unemployment was identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one of the root causes of the past conflict and is currently considered a primary threat to Sierra Leone's continued stability. Recently, the Government has taken steps towards implementing a youth empowerment scheme and set up a special account to finance that programme through unspent budgetary allocations from various Ministries under the 2006 budget.

53. The United Nations system in Sierra Leone has contributed to youth empowerment through a range of activities, including training in trade fairs, skills and income-generating projects. UNDP is in the lead on policy direction and programme development and collaborates closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to enhance its coordination role.

54. On 6 June, the United Nations country teams for Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire held a conference on youth-related issues in Freetown. The meeting provided an opportunity to coordinate activities focused on the needs of youth, including job creation strategies, as well as cross-border cooperation. UNIOSIL is working closely with the Mano River Union Secretariat and the United Nations country teams in the subregion and Côte d'Ivoire to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of the conference.

VII. Humanitarian issues

55. The WFP continues to provide food assistance to Liberian refugees at the eight remaining refugee camps in Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, in view of the stable security environment in Liberia, the repatriation programme is under way, with some 26,000 refugees per month receiving repatriation assistance. The WFP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have agreed to continue the general food distribution to the refugees until the end of 2006.

56. On 8 June, a group of some 60 to 80 Liberian refugees staged a demonstration in front of the office of the UNHCR compound in Freetown. The demonstration was contained following a meeting between the leaders of the refugees with UNHCR officials during which the group explained the reasons for the demonstration, which included their perception that insufficient progress had been made in resettling them

in third countries. On 12 June, the same group of refugees broke into and vandalized the UNHCR office in Freetown. During the incident, approximately 20 UNHCR vehicles were damaged or destroyed. The Sierra Leone police subsequently arrested 61 individuals involved in the attack.

VIII. Human rights and the rule of law

57. The Government has continued efforts to implement international principles and standards of human rights during the period under review. Further improvement in the human rights situation was witnessed during this period, but there remain areas of concern.

58. Some progress was made in the effort to address pervasive practices that violate the rights of women and girls. With the support of the United Nations, the Government met an important international treaty obligation by preparing its first report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, there has been a delay in domesticating international conventions governing women's rights and in harmonizing domestic laws with international standards. The Parliament passed other laws on trafficking, inheritance and property rights, all of which are important to protect the rights of Sierra Leonean women. The Law Reform Commission is considering the elimination of laws that discriminate against women, including some customary laws.

59. Progress was made towards the establishment of the Human Rights Commission, with the support of the United Nations. The President has forwarded his nominees for human rights commissioners to Parliament for consideration and approval, while UNIOSIL collaborated with district human rights committees to conduct sensitization activities on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report in the country's 149 chiefdoms. To further facilitate public awareness and to promote reconciliation, a music CD and a number of radio dramas are being produced in the national languages on the various thematic subjects of the report.

60. However, important recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have yet to be implemented, in particular the establishment of a Reparations Fund for amputees and other war-wounded persons, as well as for communities most seriously affected by the war. The Government has indicated that lack of resources seriously hampered the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission and that it was working to expedite the establishment of the Fund and mobilize the necessary funds for it. I urge the Government to undertake additional concrete steps to implement the important recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

61. In courts across the country prolonged pre-trial detentions, large case backlogs and excessive remand of cases continue, despite the presence in each district of a resident magistrate funded by UNDP. The justice sector requires the further strengthening of the prosecutorial and public defender system. The United Kingdom-led Justice Sector Development Programme, in collaboration with the United Nations and other partners, continues to address the structural weaknesses and imbalance in the justice system. A national strategy for the reform of the justice sector is in development.

62. The limited operational capacity of Sierra Leonean courts and problems in the prosecutorial process negatively impact the corrections system, which is also adversely affected by poorly trained staff and inadequate facilities. At the request of the Government, UNIOSIL has launched an assessment of the capacity of the corrections system, with a view to identifying areas for intervention and assistance, as well as to elaborate a strategic approach for improving the corrections system, including the introduction of remand homes throughout the country. This assessment would also contribute to the implementation of the Justice Sector Development Programme.

63. The high profile criminal case against Omrey Golley, the former spokesman of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who has been charged with treason, continues to elicit local and international attention. The frequent adjournments and delays of these proceedings raise concerns regarding the rights of the accused. Following an intervention by UNIOSIL, the conditions of Mr. Golley's detention improved; however, his poor and deteriorating health remains a matter of serious concern. A recent application for bail on medical grounds was denied.

IX. Public information and communications

64. With United Nations support, the Government has completed an assessment aimed at the enhancement of a public information and communication strategy, which will provide, inter alia, for activities related to the transfer of United Nations Radio to national ownership. UNDP has approved some $500,000 to support the strategy. United Nations Radio currently produces programmes that are aimed at engaging all segments of the Sierra Leonean public in a national dialogue on critical issues of peace consolidation. It is an instrument for building social cohesion and promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance, and a better understanding of the democratic process.

65. A workplan has been developed by the mission to ensure easy access to and better use of United Nations Radio, and to encourage the local media to observe professional ethics and principles of fairness in covering political and development issues. UNIOSIL has established a joint UNIOSIL-United Nations country team Communications Group, to advise it on the modalities for, and timing of, the eventual transfer of the radio station and its assets to national ownership. The remaining issues relate to mobilizing the resources needed for improving the station's infrastructure and training national radio personnel.

66. In the meantime, UNIOSIL continues close cooperation with the Swiss Foundation Hirondelle, which assisted the Office in launching a capacity-building project that will provide on-the-job training for students of the Fourah Bay College Faculty of Communication. The project is scheduled to begin in September.

X. HIV/AIDS

67. Available statistics on HIV/AIDS prevalence in Sierra Leone indicate that the national HIV prevalence for the general population aged 15 to 45 is 1.53 per cent, with 1.5 per cent in males and 1.6 per cent in females. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) facilitated an inclusive, nationally led

consultation to identify the main barriers to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services. A road map for action is now in place.

68. The United Nations is helping to leverage financial resources from the Global Fund to support the national response, as well as subregional initiatives targeting refugees and other mobile, cross-border populations, as well as returnees and host communities. The United Nations is also supporting the drafting of a bill to protect the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS, in collaboration with Parliament and the Forum for Arab and African Parliamentarians for Population and Development.

XI. Personnel conduct and discipline

69. UNIOSIL continues its efforts to maintain high standards of discipline among United Nations personnel, in particular, to prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse. During the reporting period, three allegations of minor misconduct involving one police and two civilian personnel were reported and are under investigation. None of the incidents involve allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. A joint task force established in May 2005 comprising the United Nations country team and embracing UNIOSIL and the Special Court for Sierra Leone will train and sensitize United Nations personnel as well as the local population to issues related to sexual exploitation and abuse.

XII. Integration of the United Nations system

70. As part of the continuing integration of the United Nations system, UNIOSIL has provided some office space to UNDP at its headquarters in Freetown. The integration of the United Nations regional offices within the country is also ongoing. UNIOSIL integration with UNDP and WFP has been completed at four of the six locations in the country at which co-location and cost-sharing, based on common services, had been agreed. UNIOSIL has also continued to provide administrative and logistical support to the UNMIL guard contingent deployed at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

71. An integrated unit has been established to provide security coverage to both UNIOSIL and United Nations agency staff and facilities in Sierra Leone. The unit works in close cooperation and shares information with Sierra Leonean security agencies, the Special Court, diplomatic missions, international non-governmental organizations and United Nations security units in Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

XIII. Observations and recommendations

72. Considerable progress has been made by the Government and people of Sierra Leone towards consolidating the hard-won peace in their country. While I remain reasonably optimistic about the prospects for long-term peace, stability and economic recovery in Sierra Leone, I am also concerned about the potentially destabilizing challenges still facing the country, including youth unemployment, pervasive poverty, and perceived as well as real persistent mismanagement. It is the

same time, I am gratified to note that some measures have been taken by the Government and its international partners to address those issues.

73. The continued engagement of Sierra Leone's international partners in its peace consolidation efforts remains necessary for the success of this important process. In this regard, I am pleased to report that UNIOSIL continues to provide critical coordination of the United Nations system and other international partners in Sierra Leone. I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Member States that continue to provide support for security sector reform, economic recovery, judicial reform, and governance reform initiatives, and other critical areas of the peace consolidation process.

74. The inclusion of Sierra Leone on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission presents another unique opportunity for the country to continue to benefit from the goodwill and support of the international community. In order to maximize the contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission within the framework of the ongoing peace consolidation efforts, the Government, Commission members, UNIOSIL and other international partners should agree on the specific priorities and modalities of engagement by the Commission at its next meeting in early October.

75. Accelerating economic growth remains the key to addressing the continued marginalization of large segments of Sierra Leone's population, in particular the youth and rural communities, and is furthermore a central component of the Government's poverty reduction programme. In order to stimulate economic growth, the Government requires urgent support in rehabilitating basic infrastructure, particularly roads and energy networks, which will have a multiplier effect on socio-economic recovery.

76. I urge the Government of Sierra Leone and all national stakeholders to take urgent steps to implement fully and effectively the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to exercise tolerance as the country moves towards the elections.

77. Now that the date for the 2007 elections has been announced, national institutions and stakeholders should accelerate the implementation of outstanding aspects of the electoral process. National confidence in the process will depend on the operational competence, independence, fairness and impartiality of the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission, as well as that of other national institutions. The leaders and membership of all political parties, as well as the media, must also engage in the electoral process constructively. In that regard, I call on those concerned to finalize without delay the political party code of conduct.

78. During my visit to Sierra Leone in July, I assured President Kabbah that the United Nations was prepared to assist Sierra Leone as much as possible in preparing for the elections. I therefore intend to dispatch an electoral needs assessment mission to discuss with the Government the nature and scope of assistance that the United Nations system could provide. I will present more specific recommendations in my next report on UNIOSIL.

79. In the meantime, I appeal to Member States to provide the resources needed to close the gap of some $8 million to $9 million in funding for the elections. I also call on the Government of Sierra Leone to continue to show its commitment to the

electoral process by increasing its funding for the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission.

80. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Sierra Leone and its international partners for their close cooperation with UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team. I also extend my thanks and deep appreciation to the military and police personnel contributing countries providing staff to UNIOSIL for their continued support to the cause of peace and security in Sierra Leone. I would also like to thank my Executive Representative, Victor Angelo, and all personnel of the United Nations in Sierra Leone, for their tireless efforts to help to ensure that Sierra Leone achieves durable peace and security and sustainable development.

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